

Toshiko in the Japan Earthquake Google Person Finder

"I thought for my family, especially the older family members in the disaster-stricken areas, it would be almost impossible to use technology. But, even though they couldn't send out messages themselves, we were able to find peace of mind about their safety from the messages posted by others."

google.org/personfinder

Locate loved ones who have been impacted by a crisis

Background

JAPAN EARTHQUAKE & TSUNAMI, March 2011 - When the first earthquake happened, I was at my office in Tokyo. The office is on the 6th floor of the 20 floor building. The quake was so strong and it was hard for us to run down the stairs. After the second earthquake, I decided that I must go home. I am living with my old parents and 2 children and was trying to call or e-mail them with my cell phone, but the line was busy or disconnected.

My mother's relatives all lived in Ofunato City where the terrible tsunami attacked. We tried to call them because we couldn't think of any other way to reach them. But, as you can imagine, we didn't succeed. On TV, the news showed the horrors of the fires spreading, houses collapsing, people dazed and confused. We felt hopeless.

Google Tools

The next day, when I went online to check my [Gmail](#), I saw the line "[Google Person Finder](#)." Our relatives are not very young and I didn't think any of them could use the computer, but I felt like a drowning man grasping at straws. I couldn't think clearly at all. Luckily, the instructions were easy to follow. I was so upset, but I gave it a try. I put my uncle's name and then I found out 2 of other relatives were looking for him. That means at least 2 of our relatives survived. Then, I put 4 more relatives' names and saw other people were also looking for them.

There was hope! We were delighted that at least 2 of our relatives survived. After 2 days, we learned that 5 of our relatives survived and 1 of them was still missing, all through [Google Person Finder](#). We still couldn't talk to them directly for over a week, but we were able to stay calm as we knew they were alive.

At first, there were messages that read, "This is Toshiko in Tokyo. I'm a relative of Taka and looking for him. If someone knows his situation, please post a message." Then, I saw a hopeful message: "Got a call from Tadashi's daughter in Miyagi saying he is fine. His house was destroyed, though."

Tech Tip

Get a solar battery for your cell phone. And don't underestimate the power of the Internet. I thought for my family, especially the older family members in the disaster-stricken areas, it would be almost impossible to use technology. Their entire lifeline was dead. But, even though they couldn't send out messages themselves, we were able to find peace of mind about their safety from the messages posted by others.

**Please note, names have been disguised to protect the privacy of those involved in this story.



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